PATTERNS OF POWER · A NOTE ON METHOD

The Bracket

Why the project brackets sincerity: interior states cannot be observed, testimony is shaped by position, and a single act is compatible with every soul that might have performed it — but formation can be read from outside, costs count only where enforced, and the function of a believed word is invariant under everything we cannot know

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with Claude (Anthropic)

2026

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The Problem the Normans Pose

The study of the Norman south closed on a scene this collection has used twice now as a signature: the victors of Civitate, excommunicate plunderers of church land, kneeling on the field to the pope they had just captured. The closing audit conceded that the kneeling was sincere and argued it was also position logic, and declared the two descriptions one act. A reader is entitled to ask how the project knows the first half — and the honest answer, which this note exists to give in full, is that it does not, cannot, and has built its entire method around not needing to.

Consider what the observable record of that afternoon actually constrains. A man kneels to his captive. The act is fully compatible with a spectrum of interiors that runs, without a visible seam, from one end of the human range to the other: the genuine penitent, terrified for his soul, kneeling because God's vicar is God's vicar whatever army lost; the anguished strategist, devout and damned in his own ledger, who will not let his religion interfere with his ambitions and fears hell quietly for it; the untroubled realist, formed to the faith and certain that the world simply is this way — a man must conquer or serve, and the kneeling is what one does, and no apology is owed to anyone for the weather; and the heartless instrument, performing a gesture priced to the denier, for whom the pope is a tool with a hat. Four interiors — and the medieval south certainly contained all four, distributed through three thousand kneeling men in proportions no one will ever recover — producing one identical act, recorded by chroniclers each of whom had a position of his own. The act survives. The proportions do not. Any method that requires the proportions has disqualified itself from the start; and most narrative history, the project observes without pleasure, requires the proportions, supplies them by intuition, and calls the supplying insight.

What Can Be Known From Outside

The bracket begins, then, in plain epistemics: the interior state of another human being is not an observable, and the substitutes on offer are worse than nothing. Testimony — the obvious substitute — is itself an act, performed from a position, and this collection's own files are a museum of the consequences: the nine months at Benevento that are an honoured guest's sojourn in the Norman chronicles and a captivity in the papal ones; the vassalage of Granada, a hand-kissing feudal submission in the Castilian records and a treaty between equals in the Nasrid; the conquest of Sicily, positional opportunism in the documents and holy war

in the histories written twenty years later by men on the victor's payroll. Even self-testimony obeys the rule — Mao's recollection of the Peking library was flagged, when this collection used it, as a self-serving source, and Metternich's account of Napoleon's confession at Dresden was admitted only because forty years of the confessor's documented conduct corroborated every clause. Memory is sorted by position; speech is conduct; and the soul behind both is a room no historian has entered. The project does not claim the room is empty. It claims the door is locked, and that a method must be built entirely from what stands outside it.

What stands outside it turns out to be enough, and itemising the inventory is this note's real business — because the bracket is routinely mistaken for a cynicism, a quiet verdict that the believers were all performing. It is the opposite: a discipline that refuses every verdict about interiors, the flattering ones included, and then shows how far the analysis runs on observables alone.

The Decision Model and Its Two Unknowns

Start with the simplest serviceable model of conduct, the one this project actually uses: people weigh benefits against costs. Stated so baldly, the model is empty, and the emptiness is instructive, because it has exactly two holes and the bracket is the discipline of filling both from outside. A benefit is only a benefit relative to what a man *values* — and values are interior. A cost is only a cost if it will actually be *collected* — and collection is a fact about enforcement, not about price tags. Fill the first hole with guessed sincerity and the second with nominal penalties, and the model produces novels. Fill them as follows, and it produces this collection.

For values, the observable source is *formation*: the community that raised the man, and what that community praised and punished. One need not read a single heart to establish that eleventh-century Norman knighthood was formed to prize land, lineage, lordship, salvation and standing in roughly that entanglement; the praising and the admonishing were public, institutional, recorded — the songs, the sermons, the inheritance customs, the penances. Formation is the baseline value-set, installed before the man could weigh it, and it is legible from outside because it was installed from outside. And here the bracket performs its most useful single service, the one the Norman case demonstrates: it recovers the *intangibles* without any claim about souls. Men want more than revenue — they want to be a king and not a bandit, a Christian prince and not a locust, the equal of the Norman lords of England rather than the chief of a successful robbery; the hunger for legitimacy, honour, a name cleansed in the mouths of priests, is as real a motor as land-hunger and often a costlier one. The narrative tradition sources these hungers in the heart and must then debate each heart's sincerity forever. The bracket sources them in formation — the hunger to be a legitimate king is itself the believed word's product, installed at the same font as the faith — and is thereby licensed to use them *either way*: whether the duke craved the crown's sanctity in his soul or merely required it in his budget, formation had made sanctity the currency, and the conduct — the cathedrals funded, the fortunes paid at Melfi, the kneeling — prices the currency identically on every branch of the unknowable. The analysis loses nothing it can use and sheds everything it cannot check.

For costs, the observable test is *accountability*: a cost enters the ledger only where an enforcer exists with the credible capacity and intent to collect it. Nominal costs without enforcement are decoration — every order in this collection has statutes its elites ignored at zero price — and the discipline of asking *who collects, and how certainly?* dissolves a hundred false puzzles about why pious men sinned strategically. It also yields, in passing, one of the collection's better insights about the institution at the centre of the Norman case. The deepest costs in a medieval man's formation were eschatological — damnation, the price of exactly the

plunder and slaughter by which the Norman living was made — and eschatological costs share a famous defect: the collection date is post-mortem, and humans discount the far-dated, devoutly or not. The structural genius of the medieval Church, read through this model, was that it made hell *collectible now*: excommunication and interdict converted the post-dated debt into present-tense enforcement — the sinner expelled from the sacraments, the community, the oaths and the marriages of the living, his damnation socially executed in advance. The Normans who shrugged at sermons feared anathema in their bones, not because their faith ran hotter on Tuesdays, but because anathema was the one clause of the faith with a bailiff. Formation set the value; the institution supplied the accountability; conduct followed the only ledger conduct ever follows — the enforced one.

Conversion, and the Captured Frameworks

The model requires one extension, because formation is a baseline and not a cage: people do convert — adopt frameworks their formation never installed — and any method resting on formation must say how. The pattern in this collection's files is consistent enough to state as a mechanism. Conversion of the consequential kind begins in *disillusionment at asymmetry*: the believer raised inside a word discovers — usually in one biographical collision — that the world, and above all the elites who administer the word, are not running on it; that the cheque the word writes is not cashed where he stands. What follows is rarely the unbeliever the formed order fears. It is the *radical* — the man who takes the asymmetry as the scandal his formation taught him it was, and falls into another framework that promises the accounting his first one defaulted on. The muwallad lords presenting the brotherhood of believers at swordpoint; the volunteers of Cordoba purchasing with their deaths the boundary their community's drift was erasing; the converso generations whose children burned for the suspicion of the faith their grandfathers were forced from; the seminarian Djugashvili exchanging one eschatology for another with the structure intact — the files repeat the shape. And the receiving framework, the note adds with the coldness the point deserves, is never an orphan: there are no major belief systems lying ownerless on the ground. Every framework capacious enough to receive a radical was built, or has long since been captured, by some durable hierarchy with elites, a canon, an enforcement arm and a use for him — which is why conversion, in this collection, is so often a change of *masters* experienced from inside as a change of *truths*, and why the project tracks the defection by the structures it joins rather than the light the defector reports. The report is sincere. The reports are always sincere. That is precisely why they cannot carry weight.

The Bracket, Stated

The method, assembled: the project models conduct as benefit weighed against cost; sources the values that define benefit from formation, which is observable, rather than sincerity, which is not; admits as costs only what some enforcer credibly collects; reads testimony, including self-testimony, as positioned conduct; and analyses belief by its *function* — what the believed word does in the structure: makes force cheap, prices subordination, selects armies, converts plunder into patrimony, holds a survival inhabitable — because the function, unlike the soul, is measurable, comparable across cases, and above all *invariant* under everything the locked room conceals. The Melfi exchange runs identically whether Robert Guiscard wept for his sins or laughed at his luck; the dhimma extracts, the khutba names the sovereign, the crown converts seizure into inheritance, on every branch of every kneeling man's unknowable heart. An instrument that reads the same

whatever the hidden variable is not a confession of ignorance about the variable. It is the correct instrument — the only kind of instrument a discipline can build where the variable is hidden by construction.

Two clarifications guard the bracket from its caricatures. It is not the claim that belief is fake: the collection's oldest finding, from Cordoba to Civitate, is that the machinery works *only because* belief is real — a word nobody believed would multiply nothing, price nothing, legitimate nothing; the bracket suspends judgement on individual hearts precisely because the aggregate sincerity of the formed population is the load-bearing fact and the individual ruler's heart is the rounding error. And it is not a verdict that interiors do not matter: it is a confession that they cannot be audited, joined to a demonstration of how much can be tracked without auditing them. The note holds the standard counter-position at its close, as the project holds one everywhere: there are hinges — a Las Casas, a Talavera, perhaps a kneeling duke — where one room's contents may genuinely have bent the structure, and a method blind to the rooms will under-explain those hinges. Conceded, in full. The reply is the method's whole defence: even at the hinges, what the project used was never the soul but the *conduct* — the fifty years of filings, the Arabic grammars commissioned, the fortunes paid for words — and conduct sustained across decades against interest is the one signal that crosses the locked door with any fidelity at all. The project reads what reaches it. Everything else is novel-writing, and the dead deserve better than novels. Tested — never revealed.

A Note on Sources

A methods note cites its own collection. The cases invoked — the kneeling at Civitate and the two accounts of Benevento, the two archives of Granada's vassalage, the chroniclers' retrospective holy war in Sicily, the muwallad revolts and the volunteers of Cordoba, the converso generations, Dresden in 1813, the Peking University library — are documented, with their sources and their flags, in the studies of this collection where each appears: the Iberia Series, The Word They Could Not Plunder, Beaten Twenty Times, When the World Comes Into Play, and the project's standing instrument Position Logic, to which this note is the companion. The decision model — benefit weighed against cost, values sourced from formation, costs admitted only where enforced — and the bracket itself are the project's method, stated here in full for the first time; the epistemic ground is as old as the problem of other minds, and the note claims no novelty for it, only discipline. Its conclusions are the project's own, and are held, like everything the project holds, as tested, never revealed.